...SO THANKFULLY MY INSURANCE DID COVER MONSTER ATTACKS.
PSYCHIC TAROT PALM READING

DAMN, DUDE. THAT'S TERRIFYING.
I KNOW. WORST THING IS THE INSURANCE COMPANY TRIED TO STIFF ME,

BUT LITTLE DO THEY KNOW, I LOOK AT THE FINE PRINT.

AAAAAAAA
HONESTLY, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU SURVIVED THAT COMPLETELY UNSCATHED.

GUESS I'M WAY LUCKIER THAN I REALIZE.

SO IT JUST LEFT RIGHT AFTER? LIKE, IT DIDN'T TRY TO KILL YOU OR ANYTHING?

GRR?!

...KIND OF, YEAH.

SERIOUSLY?

YOU MIGHT JUST BE THE LUCKIEST PERSON IN THE WORLD.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE.

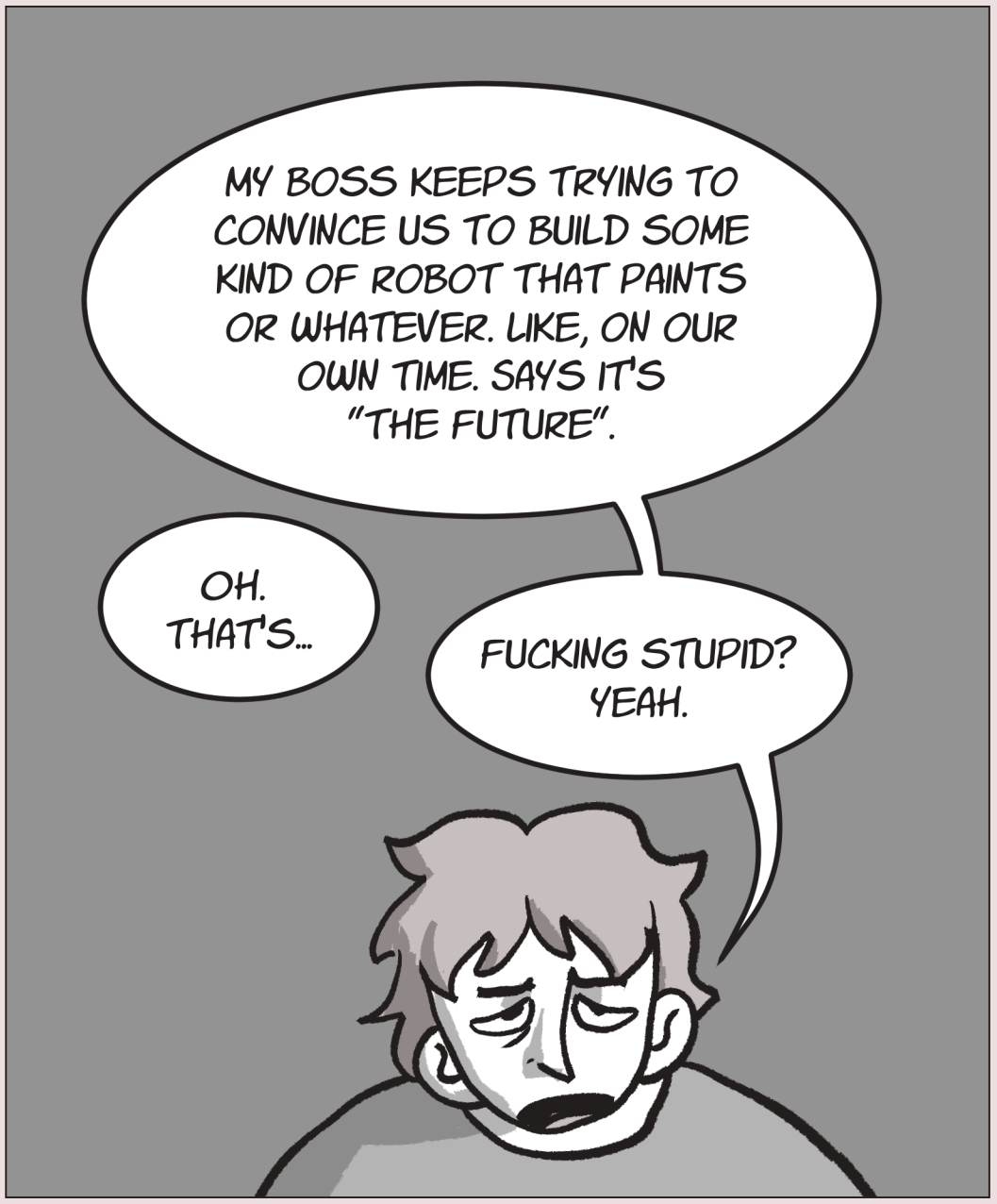
HEY!

ONCE IS BETTER THAN NEVER. ESPECIALLY IF IT SAVED YOUR ASS FROM A MONSTER.

IF YOU SAY SO.

SO, WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON WITH YOU, LUCAS? I HAVEN'T TALKED TO YOU IN MONTHS.

OH, YOU KNOW, USUAL BULLSHIT.


MY BOSS KEEPS TRYING TO CONVINCE US TO BUILD SOME KIND OF ROBOT THAT PAINTS OR WHATEVER. LIKE, ON OUR OWN TIME. SAYS IT'S "THE FUTURE".
OH. THAT'S...
FUCKING STUPID? YEAH.

I'M SO SICK OF THAT FUCKER.

SORRY, WISH I COULD GIVE YOU MY BOSS. HE STAYS OUT OF EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.
SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

WELL...

KNEW THERE WAS A CATCH.

SOPHIE TOLD ME HE'S WEIRD TOWARDS HER.

SOPHIE'S THE LESBIAN, RIGHT?

I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS OF HER PERSONAL LIFE.

OKAY.

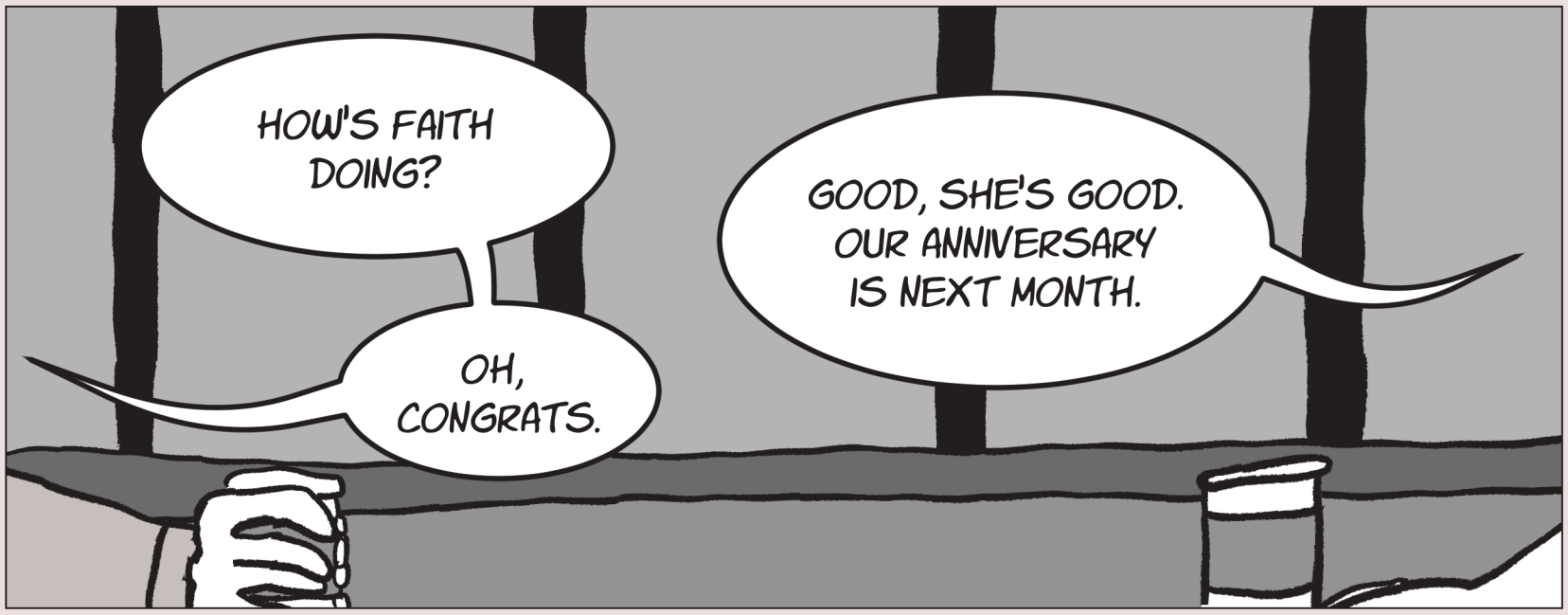
YES.

PROBABLY.

WELL I'M NOT A LESBIAN.

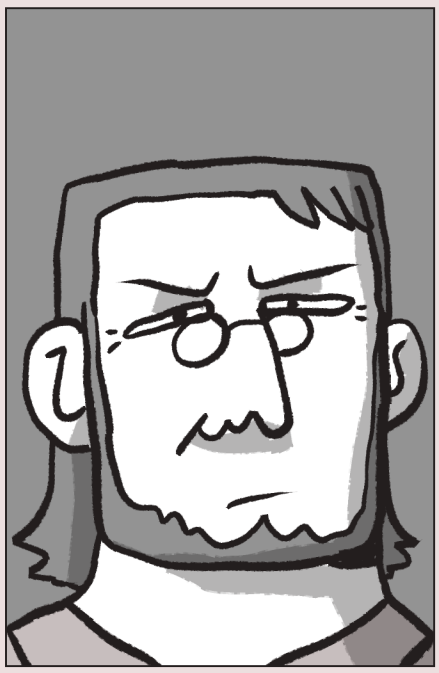
SO I'M PROBABLY GOOD.

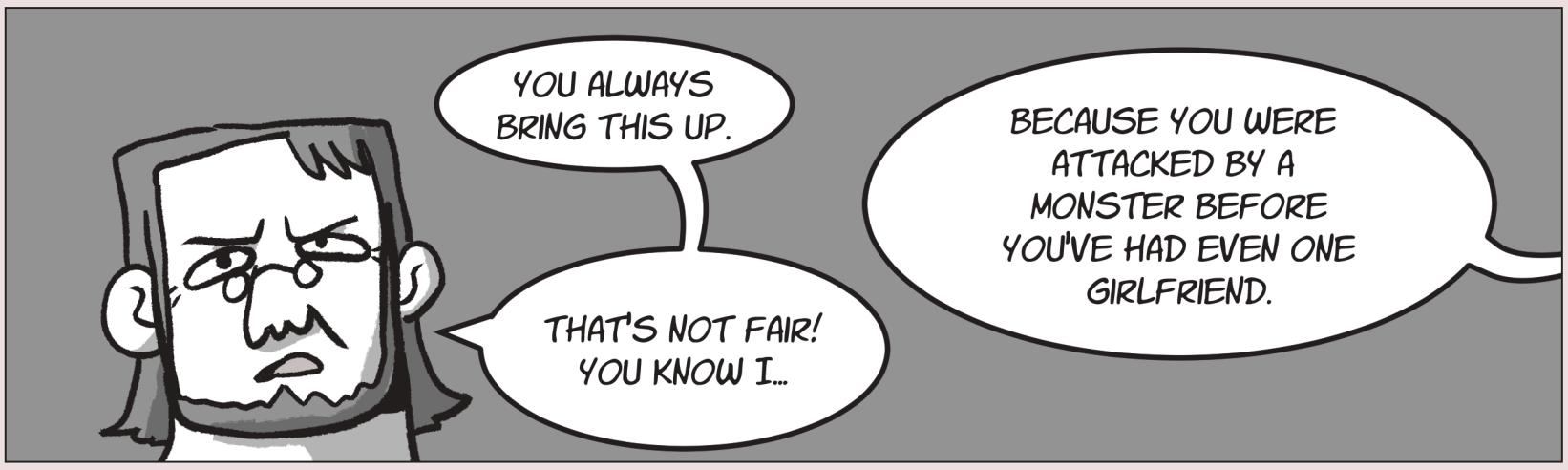
...I GUESS SO.


HOW'S FAITH DOING?
OH, CONGRATS.
GOOD, SHE'S GOOD. OUR ANNIVERSARY IS NEXT MONTH.

SO WHEN EXACTLY ARE YOU GOING TO FIND A GIRL?

LUCAS!
...IT'LL HAPPEN WHEN IT HAPPENS, OKAY?
THINGS DON'T HAPPEN JUST BECAUSE YOU WAIT FOR THEM LONG ENOUGH.




YOU ALWAYS BRING THIS UP.
THAT'S NOT FAIR! YOU KNOW I...
BECAUSE YOU WERE ATTACKED BY A MONSTER BEFORE YOU'VE HAD EVEN ONE GIRLFRIEND.

LITERALLY A ONE-IN-A-MILLION KIND OF EVENT! IF IT DIDN'T BACK OFF, YOU WOULD HAVE DIED ALONE.

I CAN'T JUST FORCE A WOMAN TO LIKE ME. ESPECIALLY ME.

NOT WITH THAT SELF-DEPRECATING NATURE OF YOURS.

EXACTLY.

LOOK,

YOU KNOW ME. YOU'VE KNOWN ME FOR DECADES AT THIS POINT. I JUST...

I DON'T WANT TO INFLICT MYSELF ON ANYBODY.

I KNOW YOU WANT TO HELP. BUT I'M JUST... NOT AT THE POINT WHERE I CAN BE WITH ANOTHER PERSON.

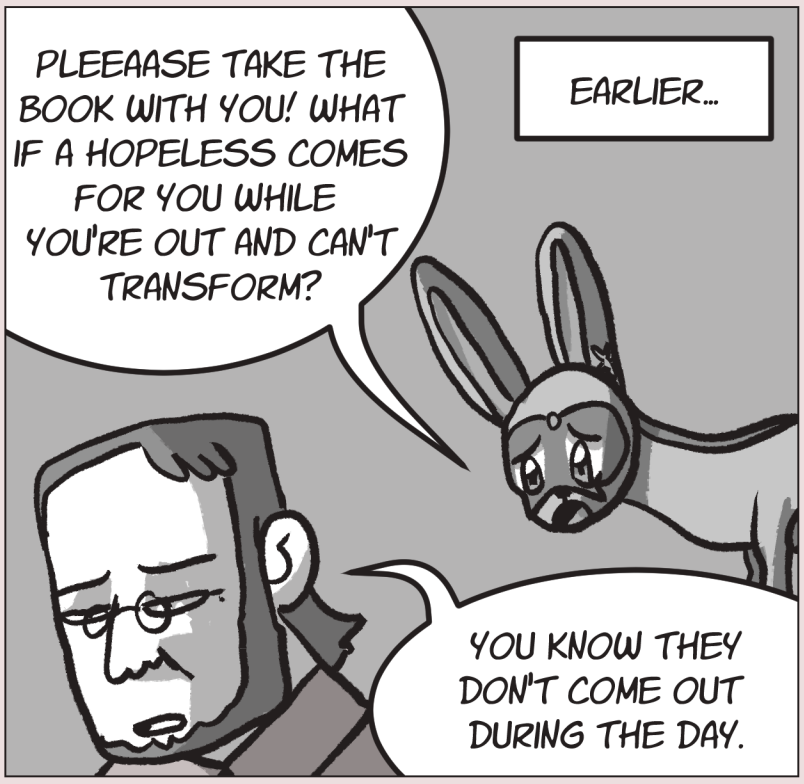
WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GET TO THAT POINT?

ANOTHER TEN YEARS OF THERAPY, MAYBE?

DUDE.

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE COMFORTABLE JUST SITTING IN THERE?
FOR HOURS?

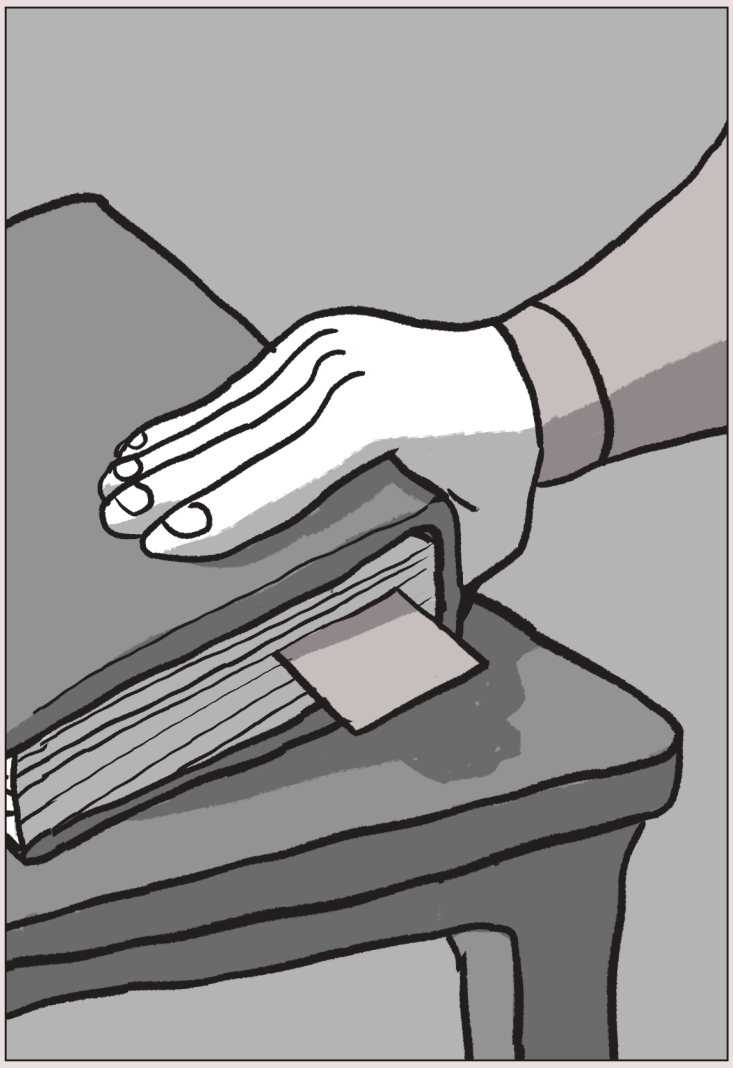
YES!!
I'M PERFECTLY FINE!

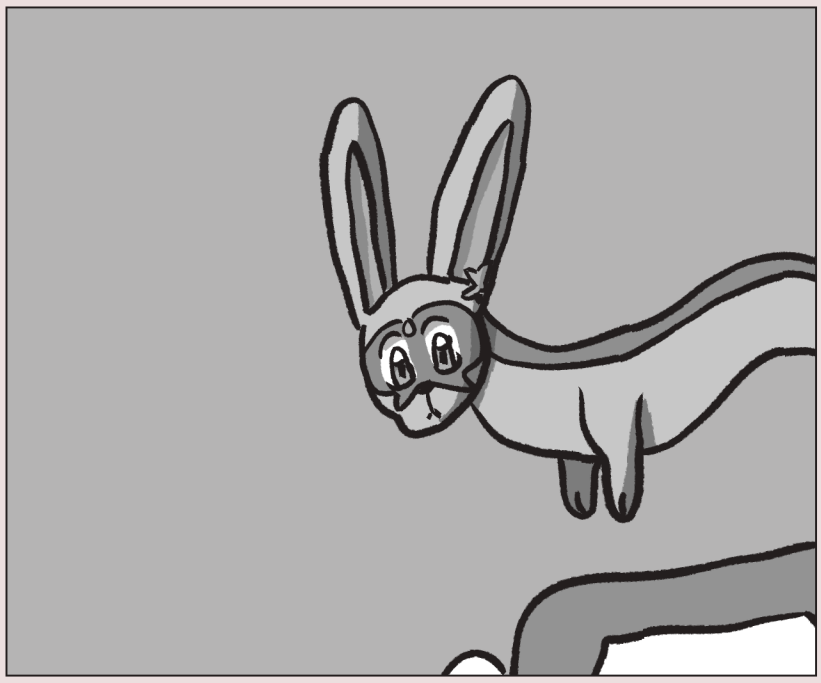

PLEEAASE TAKE THE BOOK WITH YOU! WHAT IF A HOPELESS COMES FOR YOU WHILE YOU'RE OUT AND CAN'T TRANSFORM?
EARLIER...
YOU KNOW THEY DON'T COME OUT DURING THE DAY.

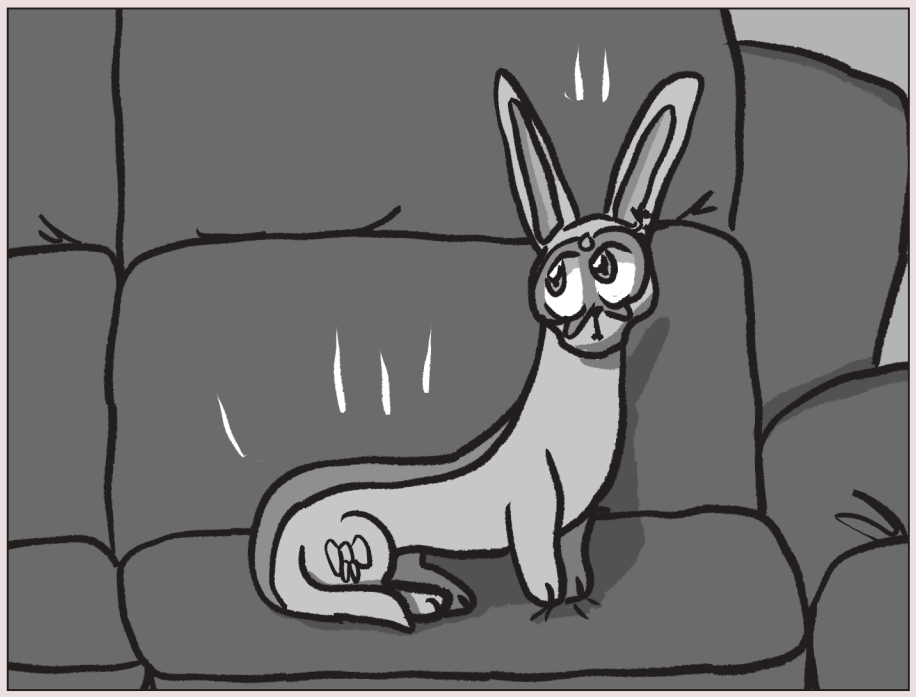
...FINE. BUT NO ONE CAN SEE YOU, YOU KNOW THAT.

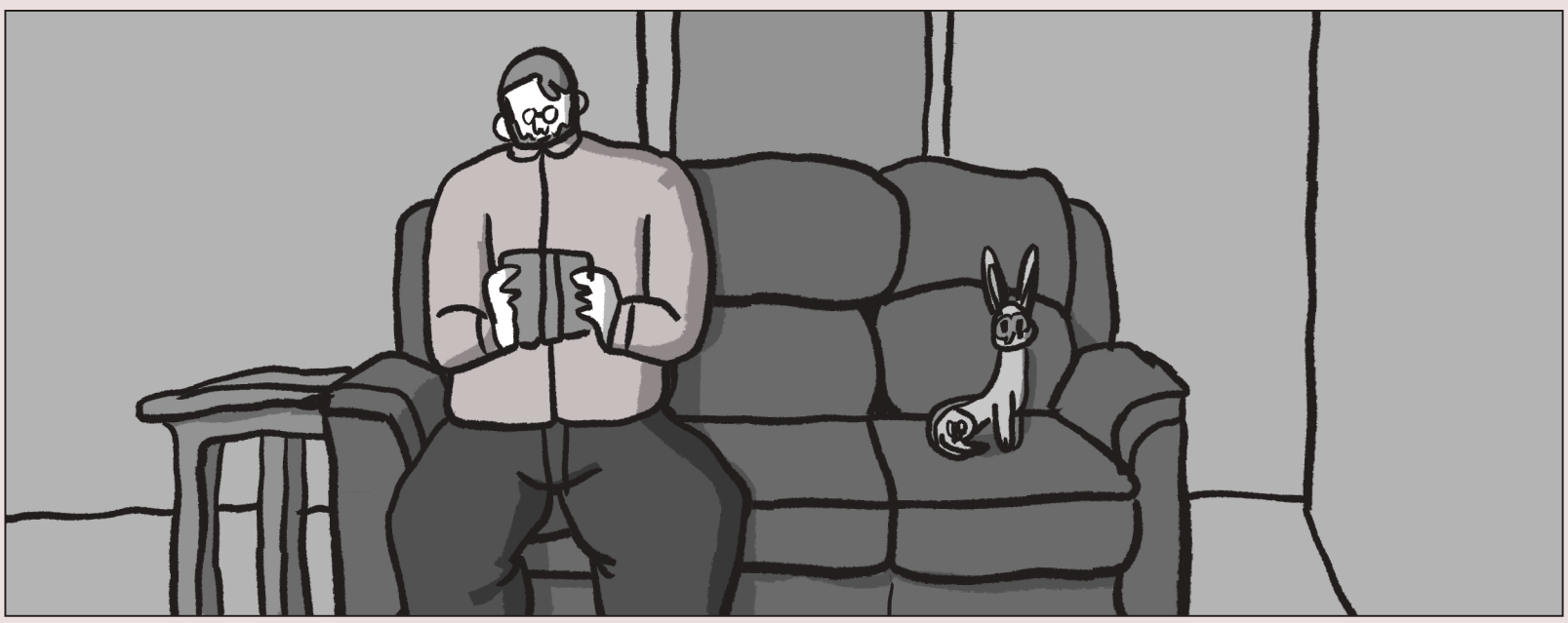
AS LONG AS YOU'RE SAFE AND SOUND, I'M COMFORTABLE ANYWHERE!

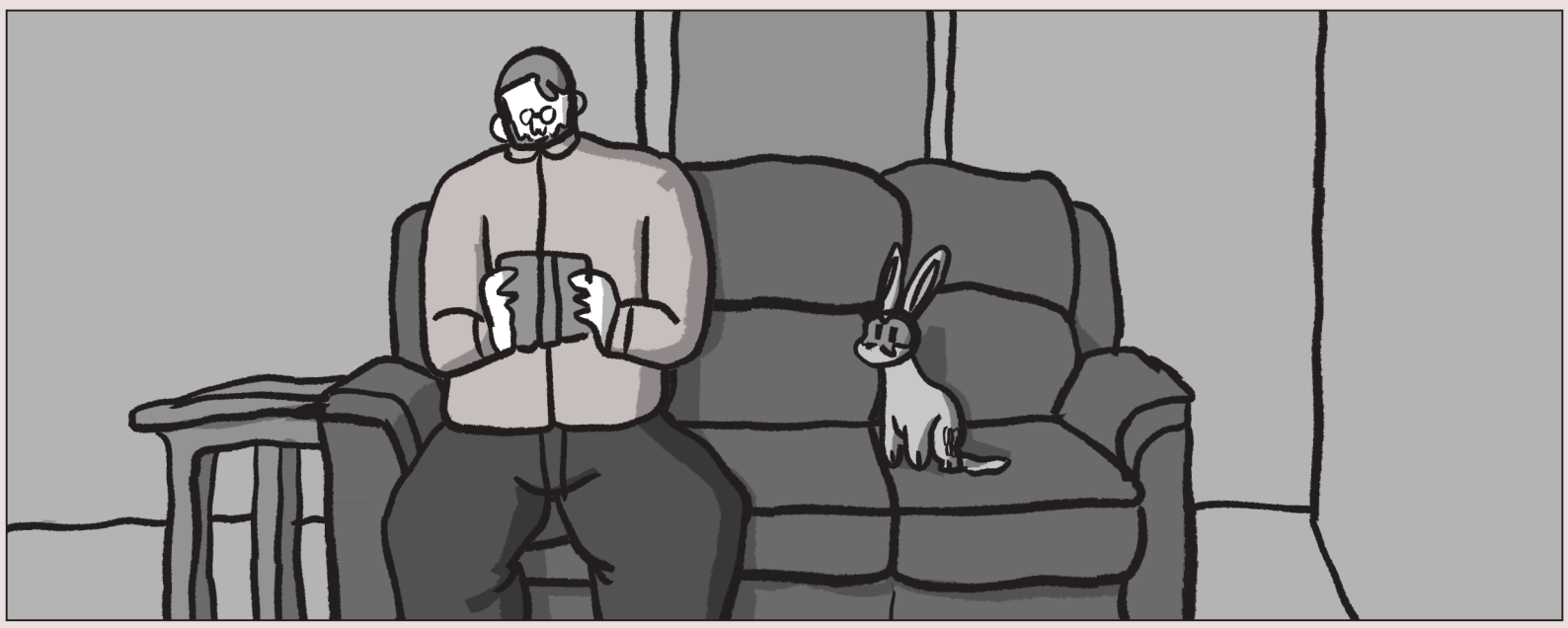
IF YOU SAY SO...

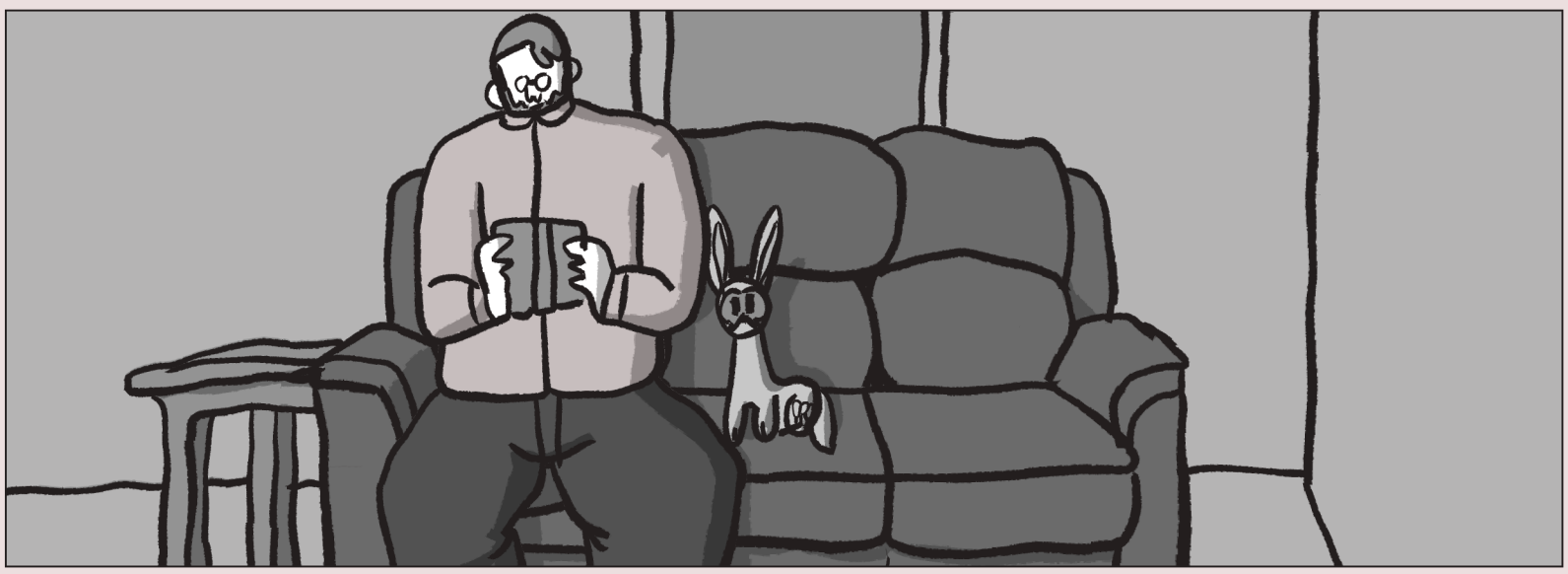


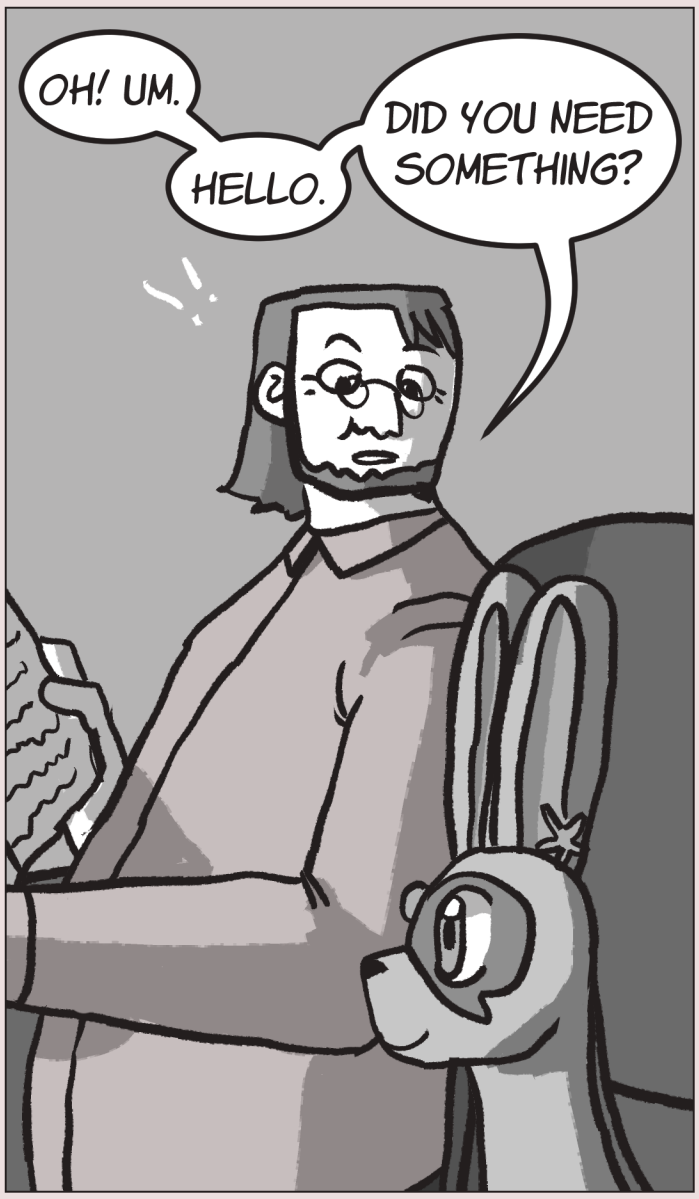


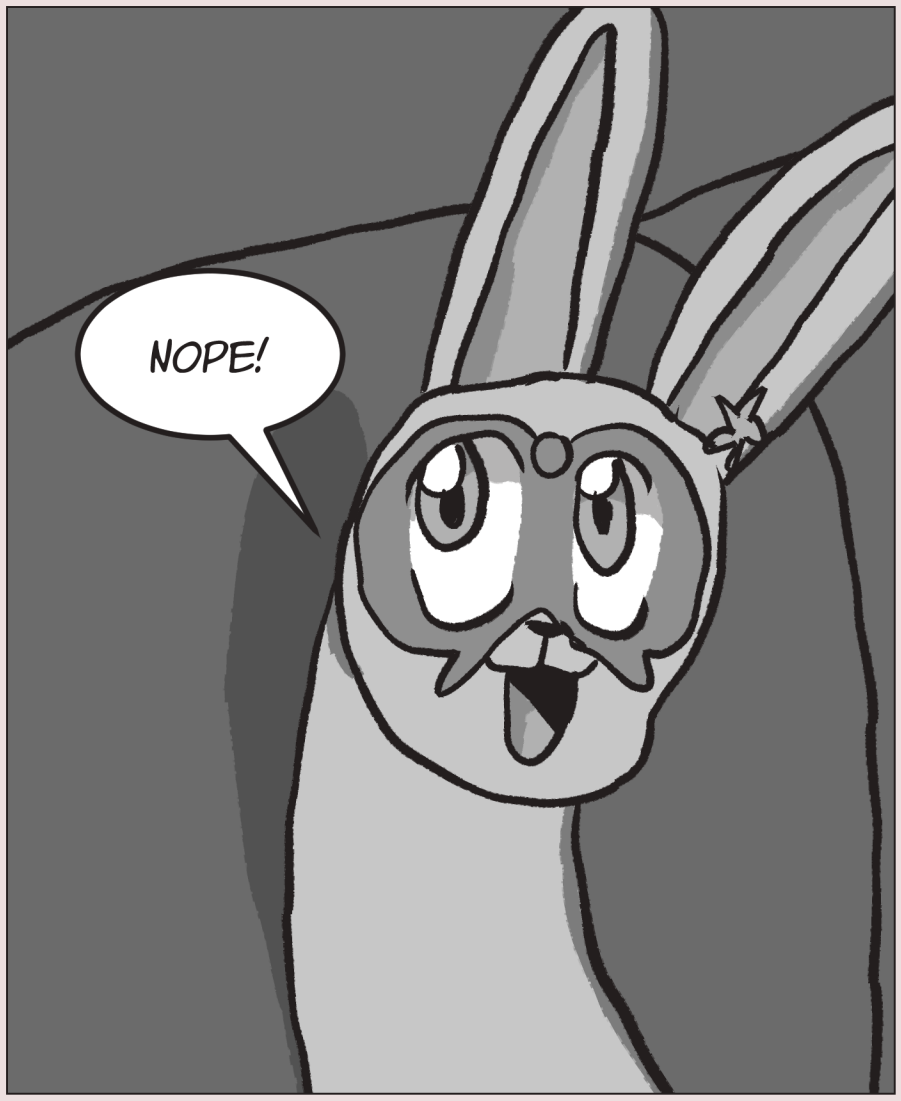


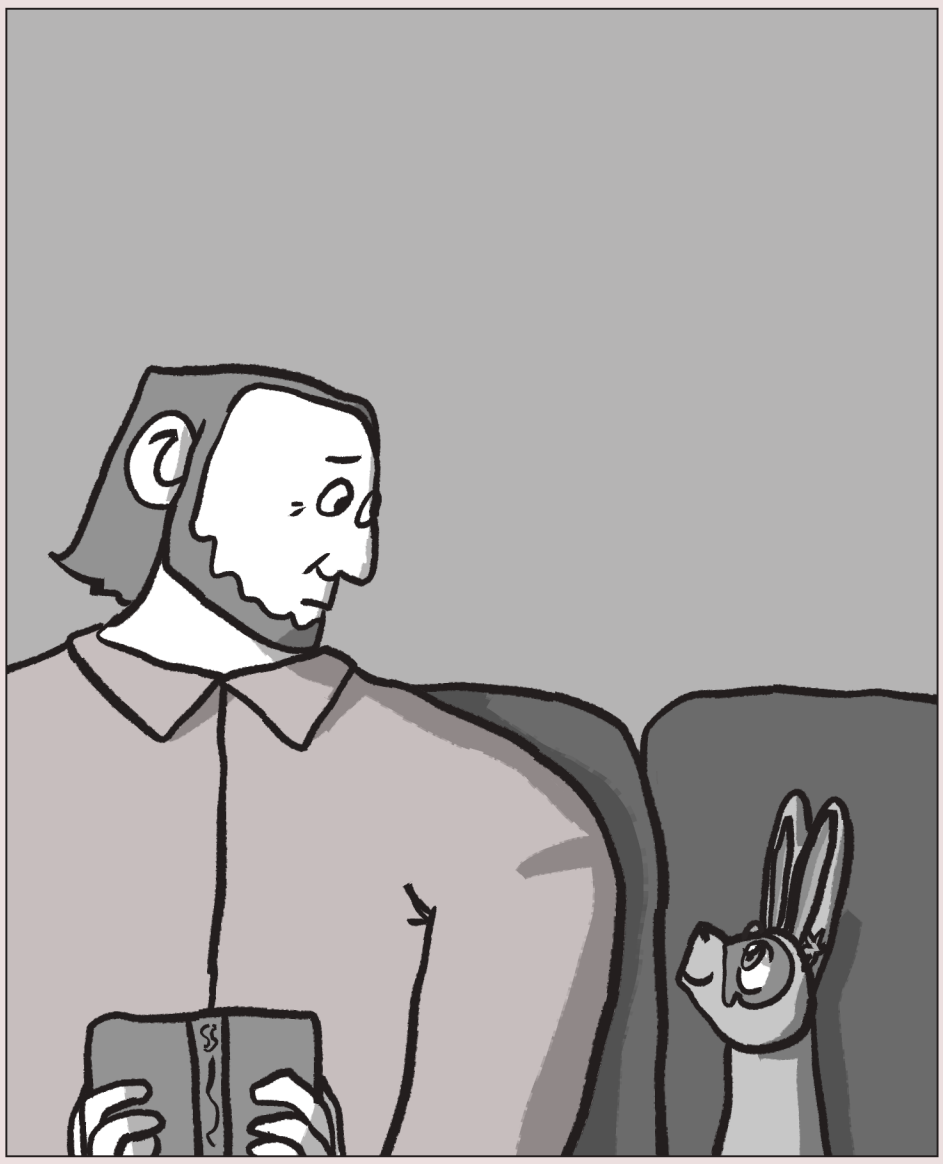




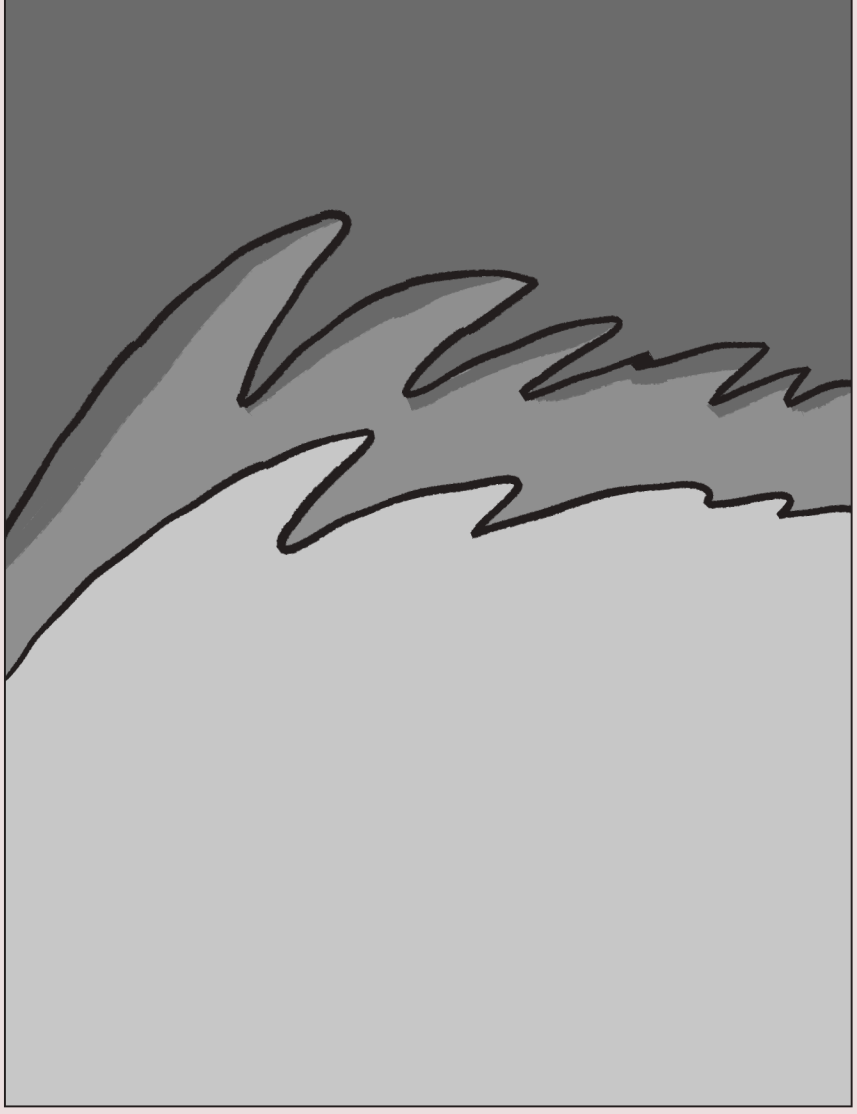


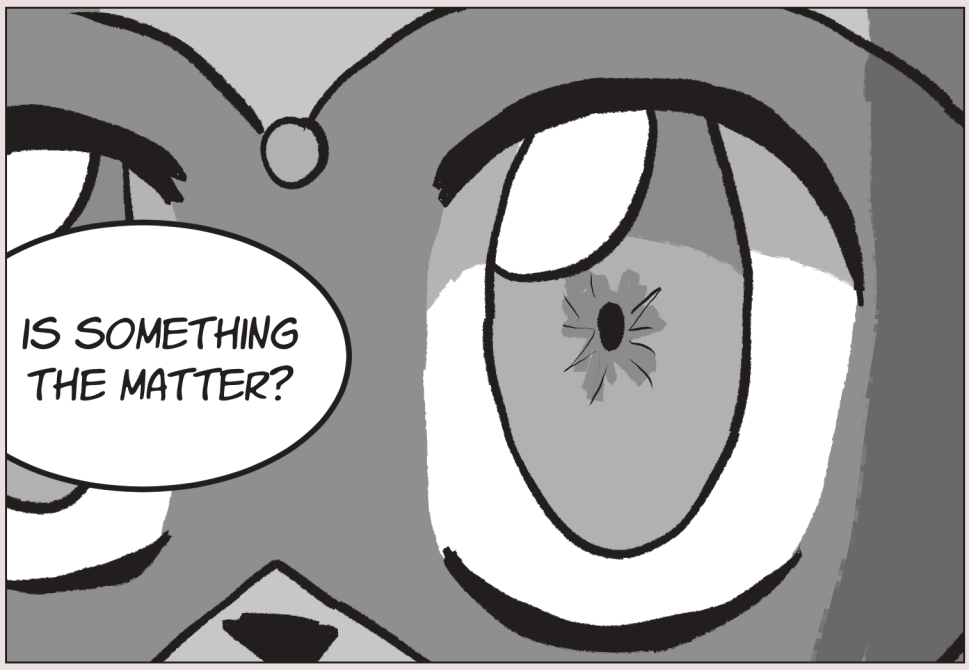

OH! UM.
HELLO.
DID YOU NEED SOMETHING?


NOPE!



YOU DON'T SHED, DO YOU?




IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

...A HOPELESS IS NEARBY.

YOU'RE SURE?
ABSOLUTELY SURE?

YES.
SIX FURLONG AWAY.
...U.S. OR CANADIAN MEASUREMENT?

FIVE FURLONG!

IT SENSES THE MAGIC OF THE BOOK, TOO!

WH-WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?! I HAVE WORK TOMORROW!

DON'T WORRY! WHILE YOU'RE TRANSFORMED, YOUR TRUE BODY GOES INTO A HIBERNATION-LIKE STATE.

YOU WON'T FEEL TIRED, EVEN IF YOU STAY UP ALL NIGHT FIGHTING!

ALL NIGHT...

IS THIS...

IS THIS JUST GOING TO BE MY LIFE NOW?

IT IS. I'M SORRY.

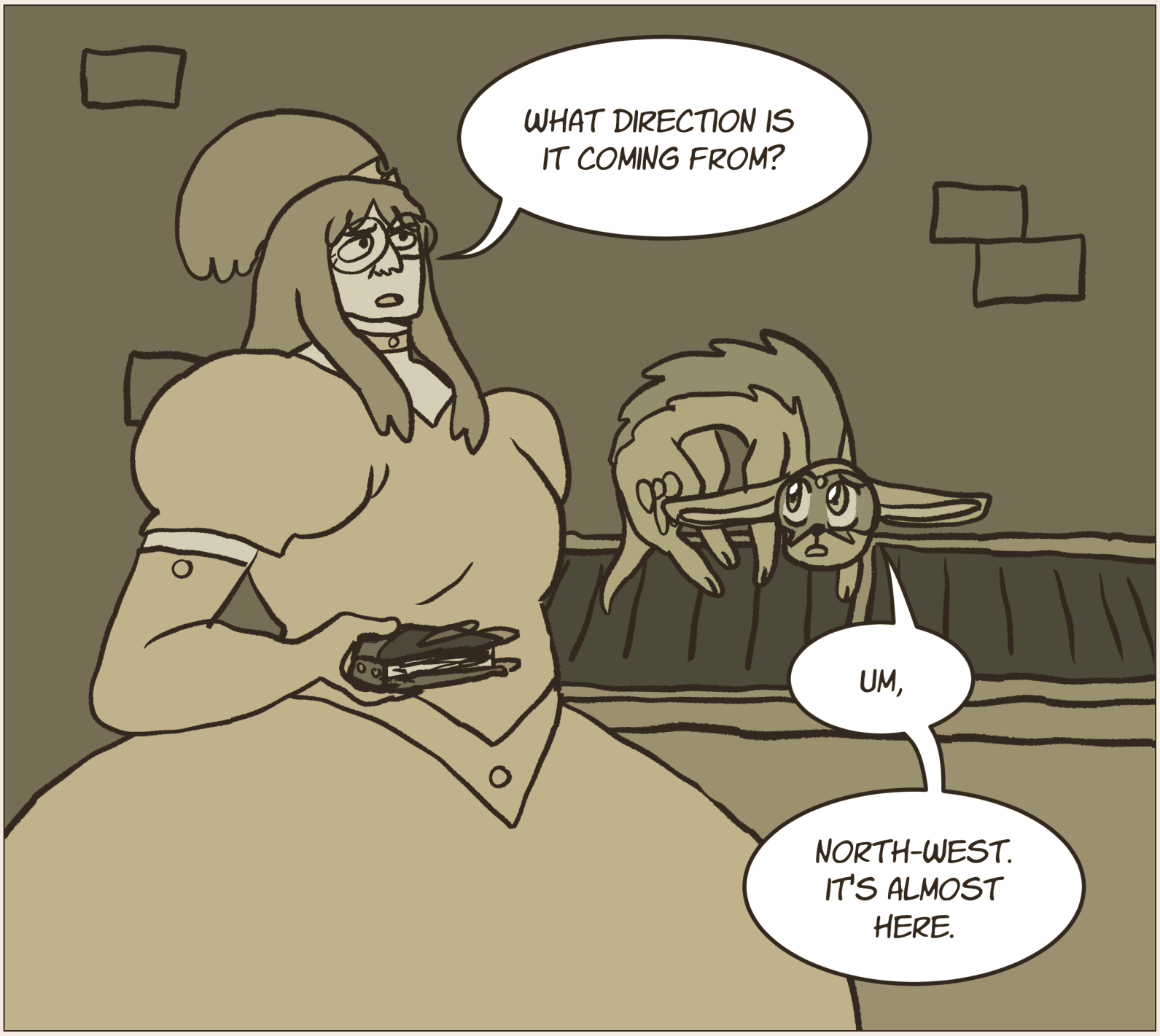
I SHOULD HAVE NEVER STOLEN THAT DAMN BOOK. LOOK AT ALL THE TROUBLE IT'S GOTTEN ME INTO.

OH GOD, AND IF I EVER GET FOUND OUT...

B-BUT THE BOOK BROUGHT US TOGETHER!

THAT'S WONDERFUL. R-RIGHT?

LET'S JUST GET THIS OVER WITH.


WHAT DIRECTION IS IT COMING FROM?
UM,
NORTH-WEST. IT'S ALMOST HERE.

GUESS I'LL JUST WAIT FOR IT TO ARRIVE, THEN.

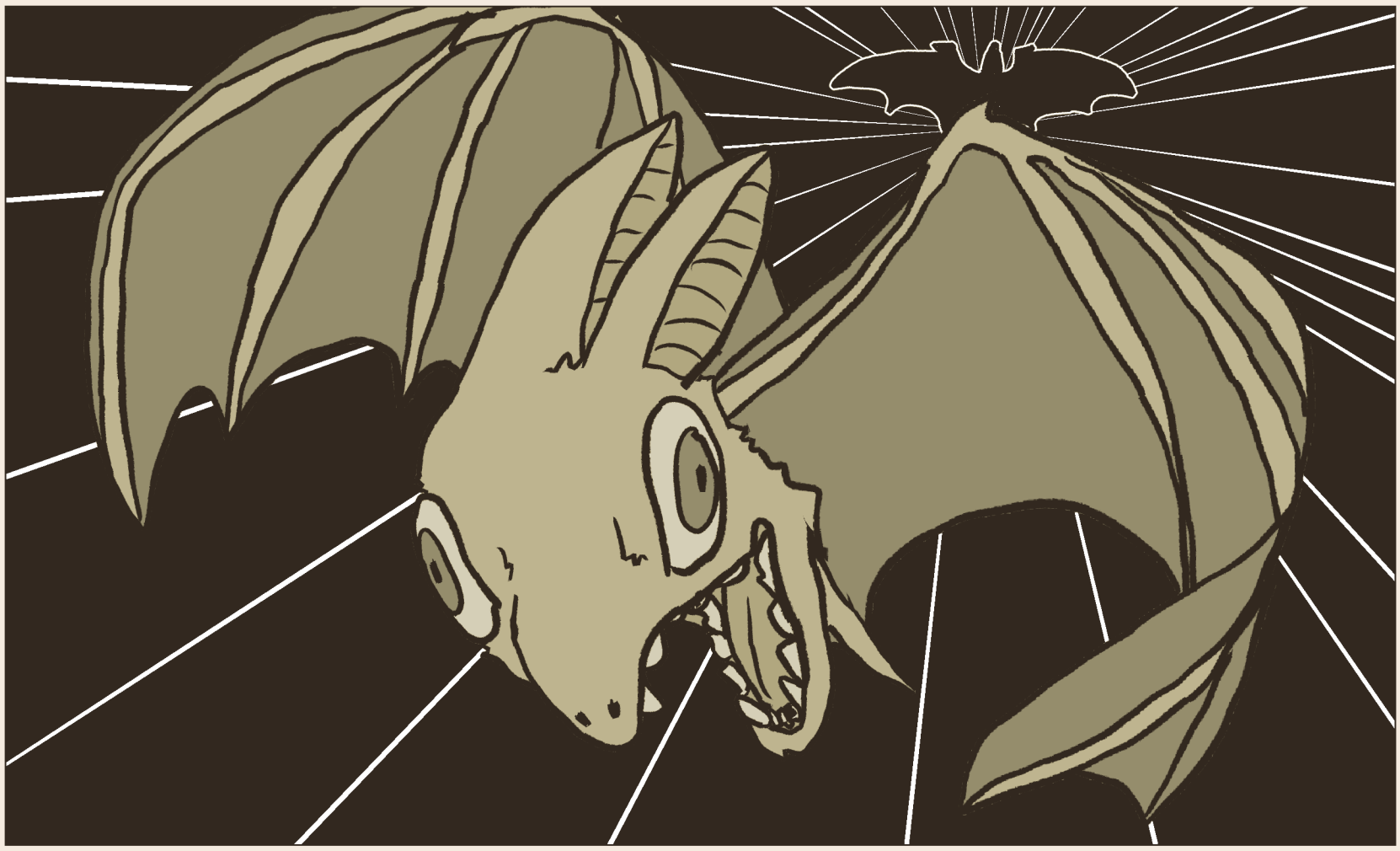
...IF I COULD HELP YOU FIGHT, I WOULD.

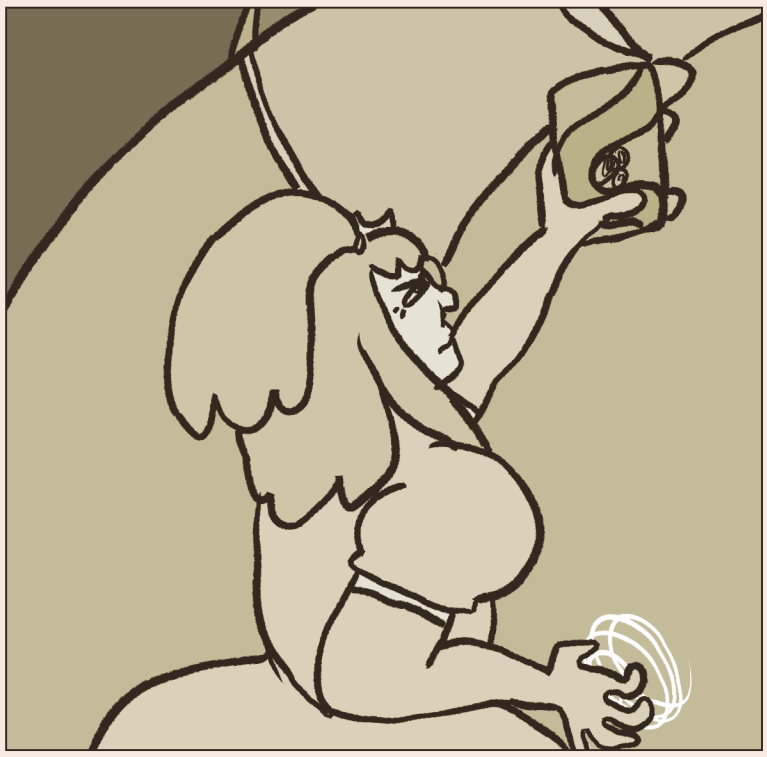
I'D TAKE OUT ALL OF THEM FOR YO

I-IS THAT IT?

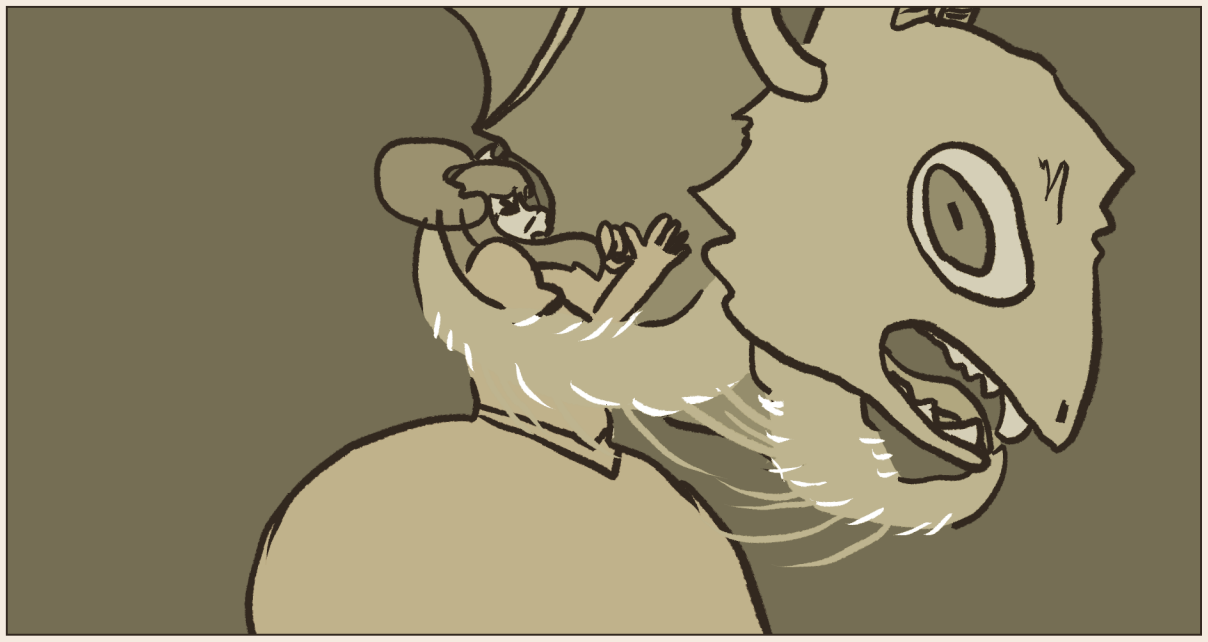
PLEASE BE CAREFUL.

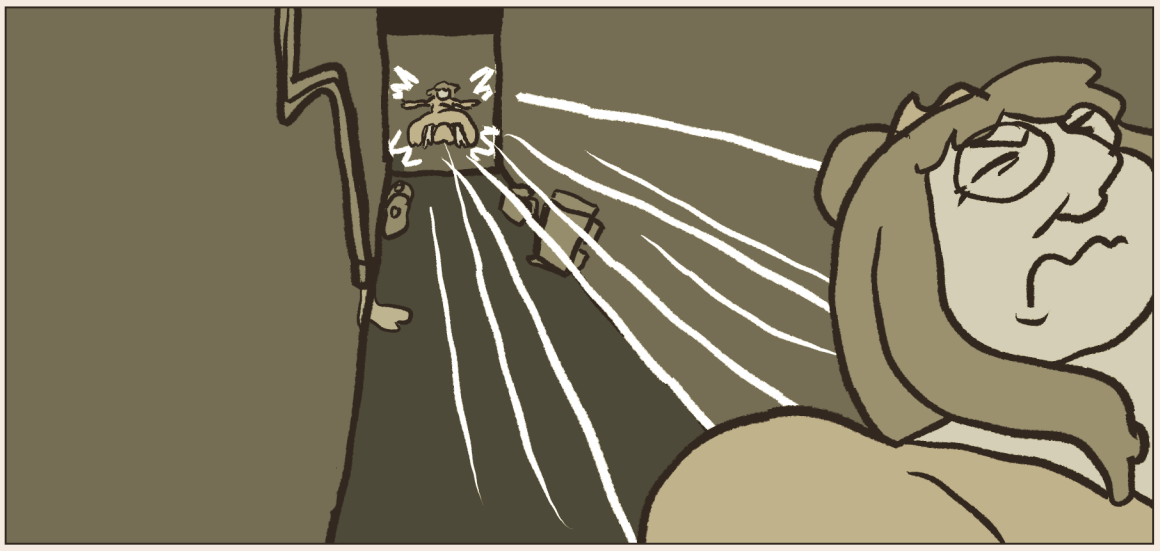
...I'LL TRY.



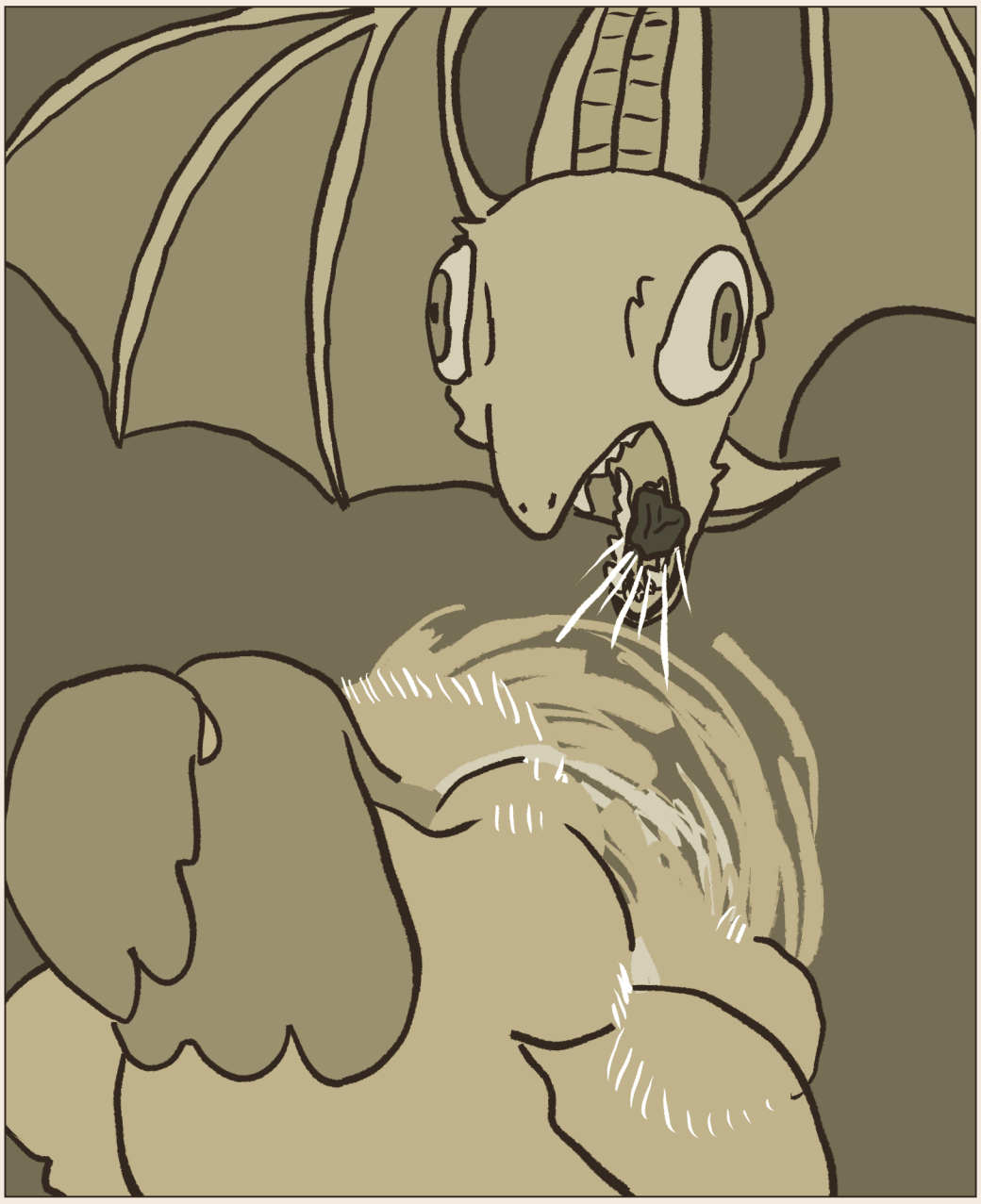


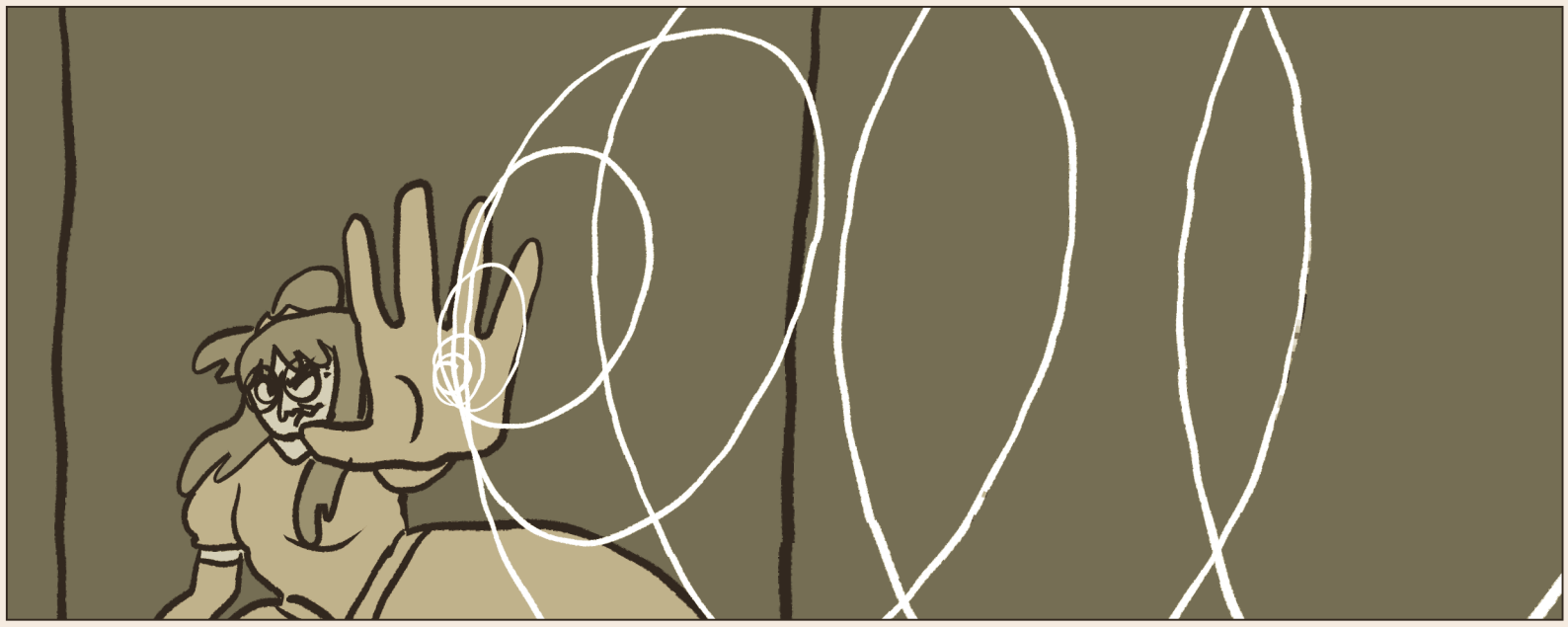
PLEASE BE OKAY...
PLEASE BE OKAY...

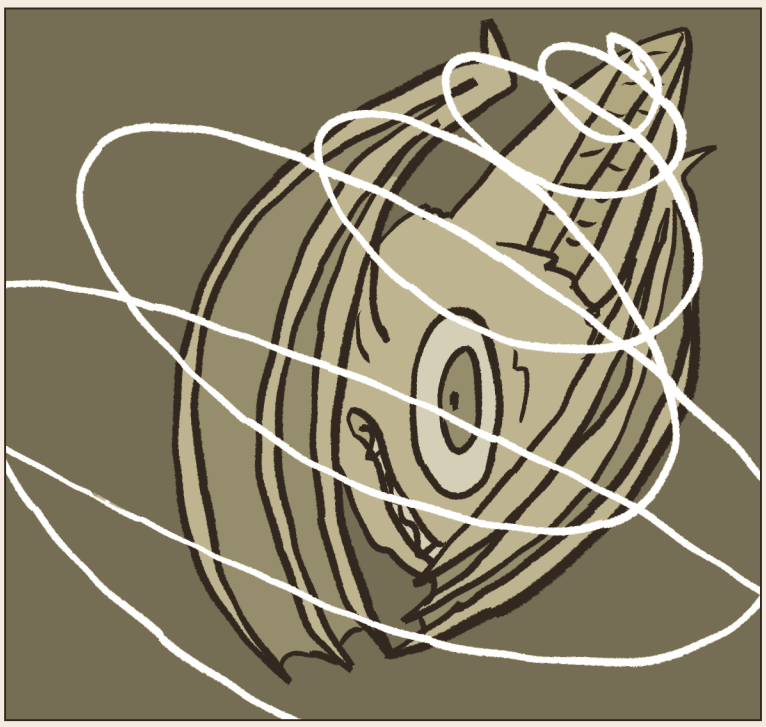


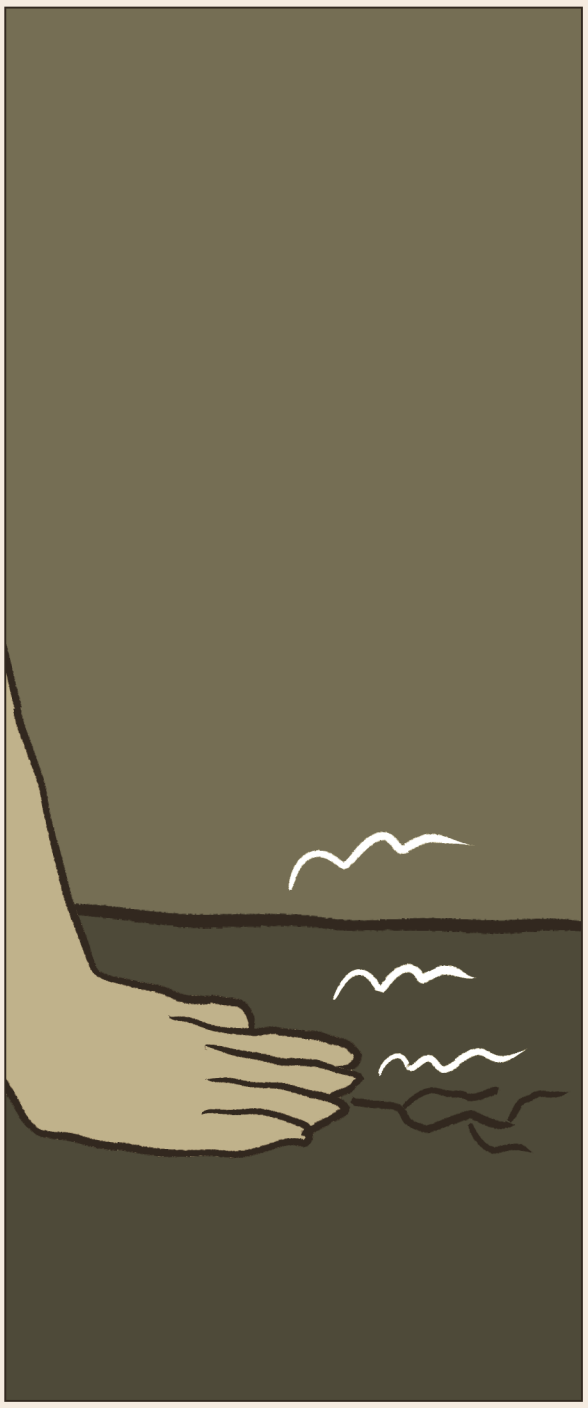


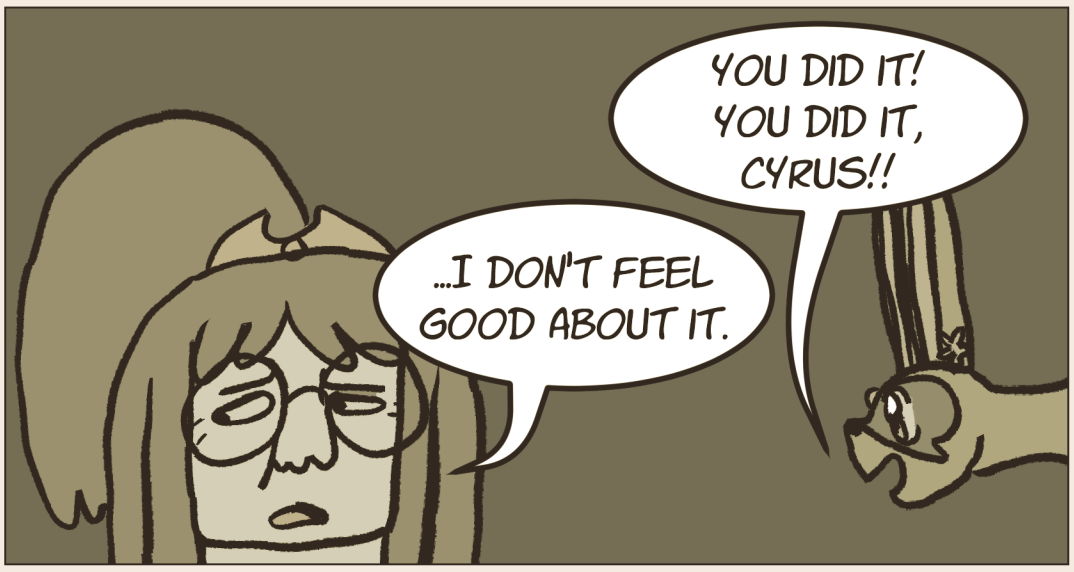
CYRUS!!









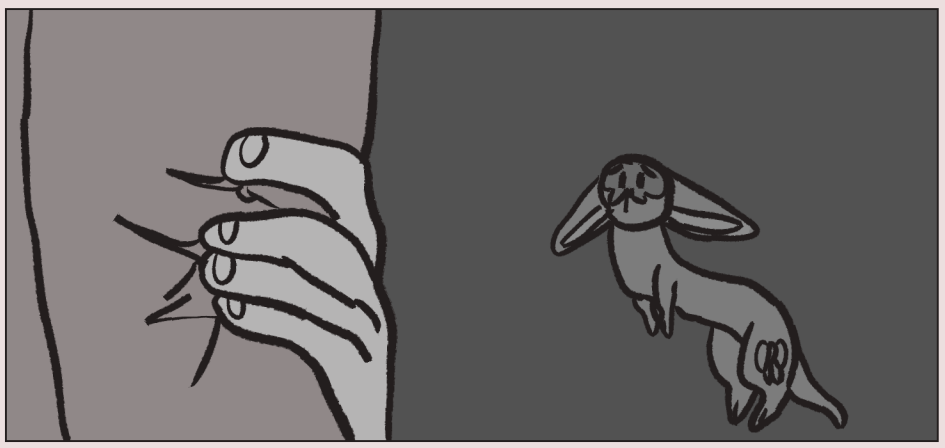

YOU DID IT!
YOU DID IT,
CYRUS!!
...I DON'T FEEL
GOOD ABOUT IT.

WHY NOT?

DISPEL.

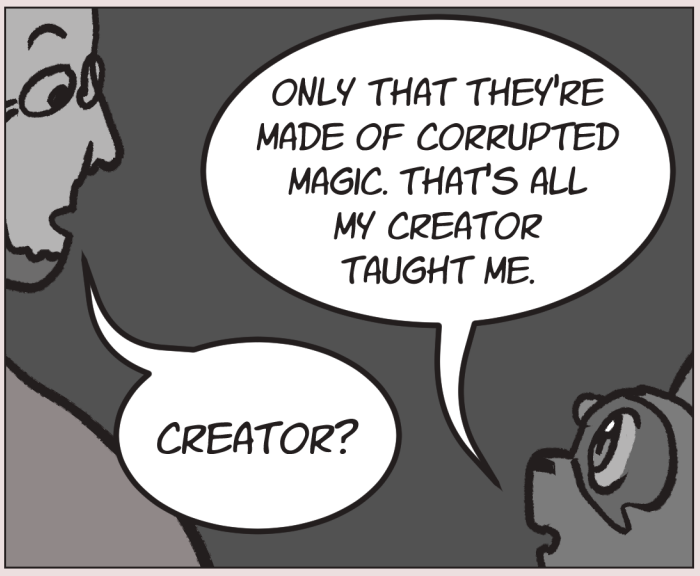
I'VE NEVER KILLED ANYTHING BEFORE.
IT'S... UNNERVING.

...I KNOW.
I'M SORRY. I WISH THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY.



BUT THEY AREN'T TECHNICALLY ALIVE, SO IT'S OKAY!

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE...
HOPELESS, YOU CALL THEM?


ONLY THAT THEY'RE MADE OF CORRUPTED MAGIC. THAT'S ALL MY CREATOR TAUGHT ME.
CREATOR?

YES! HE'S THE ONE WHO MADE THE BOOK AS WELL!

OH! THAT'S...!

!!

I FORGOT TOPAZ IS A THOUSAND YEARS OLD...!

I NEED TO ASK THEM WHAT THEY KNOW ABOUT MAGICAL ARTIFACTS!!

TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT THE BOOK, THE HOPELESS, AND YOUR CREATOR!

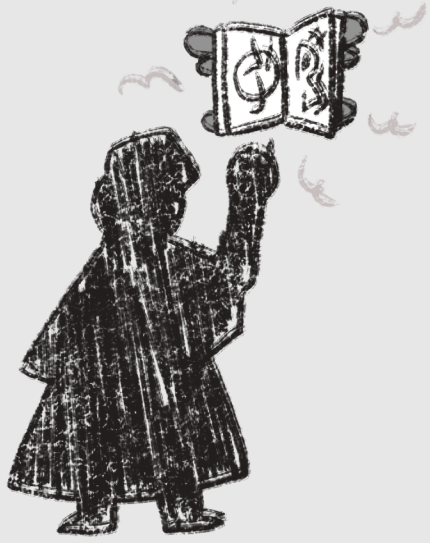
OKAY...! OKAY, YES!

MY CREATOR WAS AN INCREDIBLE MAN, I'M SO GLAD YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HIM!!

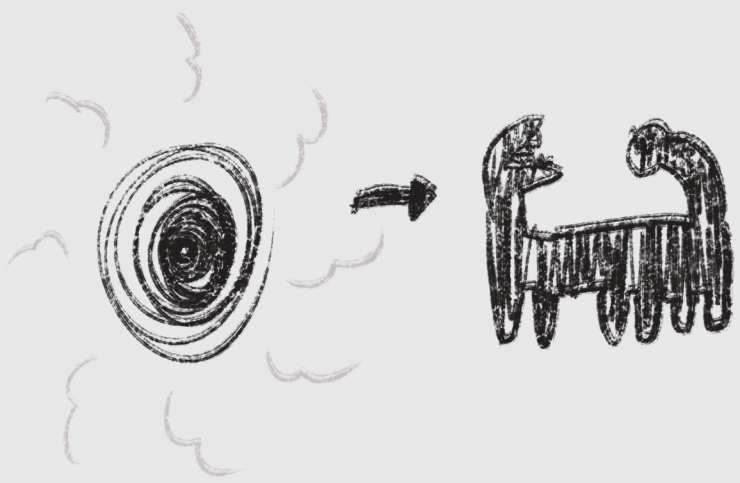
...LET'S GO BACK TO MY APARTMENT FIRST.

MAGIC EXISTS ALL AROUND US, BUT IT'S HARD FOR NORMAL HUMANS TO DETECT IT. THAT'S WHY CERTAIN PEOPLE MADE OBJECTS THAT CAN ABSORB AND STORE THAT MAGIC.

THE CREATION OF MAGICAL OBJECTS WERE DESIGNATED TO ARTIFICIERS; PEOPLE WHO HAVE A NATURAL AFFINITY FOR MAGIC. FOR EXAMPLE, MY CREATOR, THE BEST ARTIFICIER IN THE WORLD, MADE THE BOOK YOU CURRENTLY HAVE.

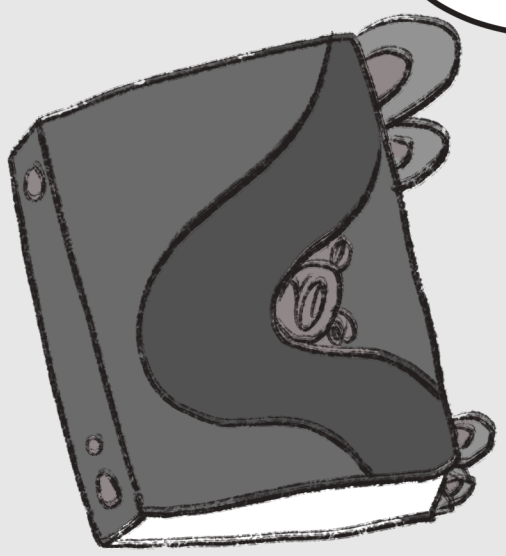


HOWEVER, MAGIC CAN SPOIL IF LEFT ALONE FOR TOO LONG. SPOILED, CORRUPTED MAGIC MANIFESTS INTO PHYSICAL FORMS. THAT'S WHERE THE HOPELESS COME FROM.



THAT'S WHY MAGICAL OBJECTS EXIST! THEY CAN KEEP THE MAGIC THEY'VE ABSORBED IN A SORT OF STASIS SO THAT IT DOESN'T GO BAD!

WAIT-



HOW DO YOU MAKE A MAGICAL ARTIFACT- OR- OBJECT? THE ART OF DOING SO WAS LOST HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO.

OH... UM... I DON'T KNOW.

poof

MY CREATOR WAS THE ONE WHO DID ALL THAT STUFF. OH, BUT HE WAS INCREDIBLE AT IT! HE WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO EVER MAKE A HOMUNCULUS LIKE MYSELF!

SO YOU AREN'T CONNECTED TO THE BOOK?

NOT AT ALL!

THE BOOK WAS CREATED TO USE MAGIC, AND, WELL, SO WAS I, BUT...

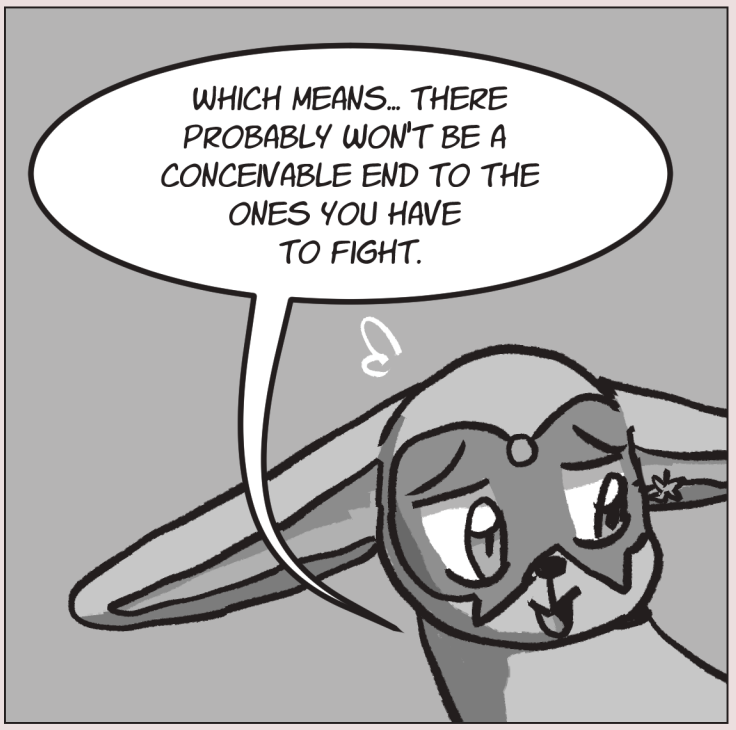
I CAN'T.

I'M... UH, SORRY.

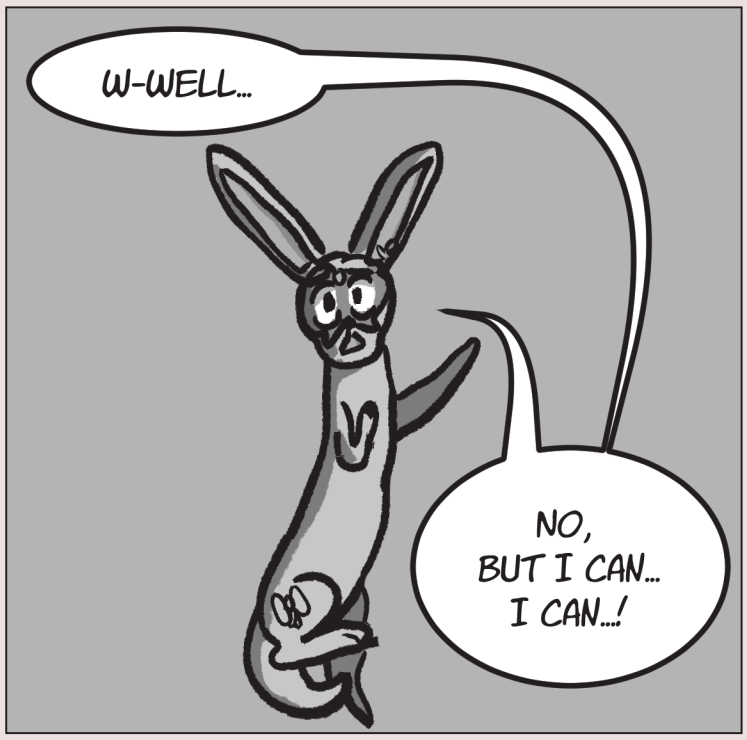
IT'S OKAY!

IT'S... IT'S FINE!

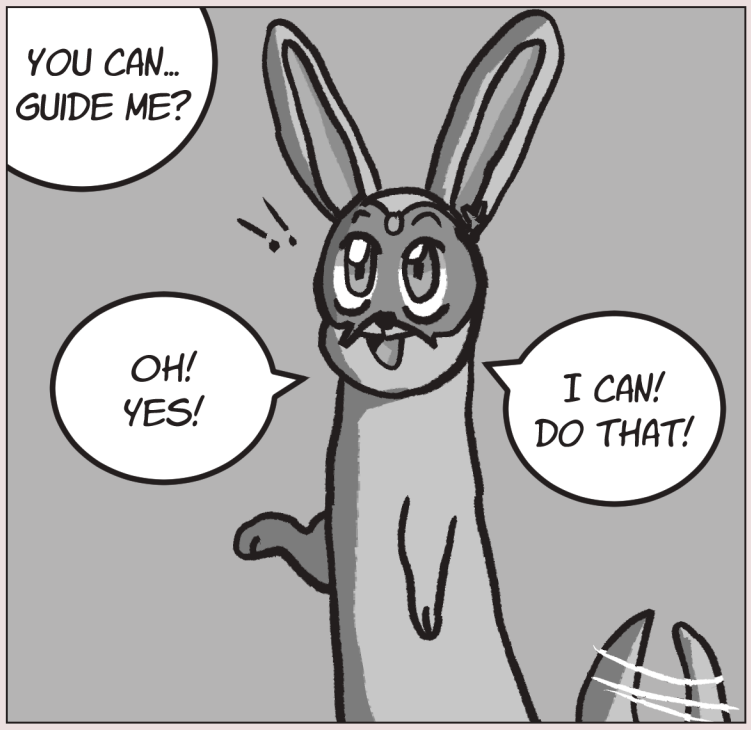
A-ANYWAY! THE LACK OF MAGICAL OBJECTS IN PRODUCTION MUST MEAN AN INCREASE IN HOPELESS...
...OH NO.


WHICH MEANS... THERE PROBABLY WON'T BE A CONCEIVABLE END TO THE ONES YOU HAVE TO FIGHT.

B-BUT IT'S OKAY! BECAUSE I'LL BE WITH YOU THE WHOLE TIME!
...YOU CAN'T REALLY HELP ME FIGHT, THOUGH, CAN YOU?


W-WELL...
NO, BUT I CAN... I CAN...!

um...
uh...
umm...


YOU CAN... GUIDE ME?
OH! YES!
I CAN! DO THAT!

GREAT...

LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

GLAD TO BE WORKING WITH YOU.

WELL!

IT'S GETTING LATE, SO, UH... GOODNIGHT.

I HOPE THE BED I GOT YOU IS OKAY.

REALLY?! MY OWN BED?!

HAVE YOU... NEVER HAD A BED BEFORE?

I'VE NEVER FELT SOMETHING THIS SOFT BEFORE!

IT'S SO COZY...!

CAN I ASK ONE LAST QUESTION?

WHY DOES THE TRANSFORMATION INVOLVE ME TURNING INTO A WOMAN?

OF COURSE!

LIKE I SAID BEFORE, IT'S THE FORM THAT GIVES YOU THE STRENGTH YOU'VE ALWAYS DESIRED!

I DON'T SEE HOW THAT RELATES TO ME BEING FEMALE.

DID YOUR CREATOR ALSO TURN INTO A WOMAN WHEN HE TRANSFORMED?

DID HE EVER TRANSFORM?

HE DID OFTEN, TO DEFEAT THE HOPELESS, BUT HE DID NOT CHANGE BODIES AS YOU HAVE. I HAD NO IDEA THE BOOK COULD DO THAT!

GREAT. SO NO REAL ANSWER.

SORRY...

NO, YOU'RE OKAY. I'M JUST SURPRISED YOUR CREATOR DIDN'T TEACH YOU MORE, THOUGH.

OH.

I WAS NEVER REALLY... I MEAN...

NEVER MIND.

SORRY FOR BRINGING IT UP.

OKAY, TOPAZ, I FINISHED CHANGING, I'LL TURN OUT THE LIGHTS NOW-

OH, LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE ALREADY ASLEEP.

GOODNIGHT.